



WHAT SHE COULD

Isabella Alden

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ALICE MERWYN felt as though she had stepped into a new world that Monday morning when she began her summer's work at Lime Rock. An entire stranger in the neighborhood, expected to teach and manage twenty restless and (judging from appearances) hitherto unmanageable children, and she only seventeen—! She was nearly overwhelmed.

And yet Alice Merwyn was not easily discouraged. She had a certain self-poise which some people called self-conceit, others named self-confidence, but which, name it as you will, grew out of a knowledge of her powers coupled with a strong faith in her Leader.

As the days went by she found she had no easy task. There were two or three disorderly spirits in the school who set at defiance all rules. She was surprised at the utter ignorance which some of her pupils showed of the Bible and religious truth

She had resolved to open school with devotional exercises, as the trustee had assured her there would be no objection to such a course. None of the children brought their Bibles the first day, but in compliance with her request there was quite a show of Bibles the next morning. One or two said they had none, and these were allowed to “look over” with those who were willing to share their books with them.

Alice gave out the chapter which she had selected for their reading, and one little girl looked up in surprise to see them all finding the place, and asked with a puzzled expression:

“Is it alike in all the books?” And then she as well as others had to be shown *how* to find the chapter. And Alice explained that the Bible was the word of God, and the books they had brought were all copies of the words which God had given to his people. When she asked how many knew the Lord’s Prayer, only three raised their hands. And as for the Ten Commandments, the most of the children had never heard of them. And Alice thought, “Surely here is work for someone.”

During that week she tried to teach them the Lord’s Prayer, but as they made slow progress in the few moments which she felt that she had a right to use in that way, she thought of a plan.

“How many of you would like to come here Sunday

afternoon and be taught about God and the Bible?"

Almost every hand went up, and the appointment was made and kept, too.

And every Sunday afternoon all through the summer Alice Merwyn spent an hour in the dingy little country schoolhouse surrounded by a group of children who soon came to hang upon her words as well as upon her chair.

"Dear me! I should think you had enough of those children through the week without going there these hot Sunday afternoons!" said May Andrus, the daughter of the lady with whom Alice boarded.

"Well, it seems that they do not have enough of me!" replied Alice, laughing a little.

"But they have no right to your Sundays!" said May.

"I differ with you; I think they have the best right."

"I do not understand; I supposed you were hired to teach five days in the week, only," replied May,

"True, Mr. Pratt engaged me for the school week, but I have another Master, May. And he seems to be saying to me 'Do this thing.' The children need me, I think, and that is why I said they have a right to a part of my Sundays."

"Oh, you are too good to be comfortable! Now, if you would give up the scheme and sit in the hammock this afternoon and read, how we would enjoy

ourselves!”

“I must not disappoint the children!” And Alice went down the dusty road, wishing that May was interested in the matter enough to go with her.

After the lesson of that afternoon they lingered a little in familiar talk. Fred Pratt had been the most unruly of all her pupils, but of late he had changed greatly, and his example was having a marked effect upon the good order of the school. That afternoon Alice said:

“I wonder how many of us hope we are Christians? Or how many are trying to be Christians?”

There was a little hesitation, a looking shyly at each other, then three hands went up. And Alice’s heart gave a great bound of thanksgiving.

“What makes you think so?” she asked, and Fred spoke first.

“For one thing I think I am not as saucy to you as I used to be, and I know I could not help it, if Jesus did not hold me back from getting mad. Oh, Miss Merwyn. I have learned a great deal from you! I never knew anything about the Bible before you came! I read it some, but it never seemed a bit interesting, but now I love it, and I just want to tell people how nice it is. I don’t believe everybody knows about it!”

“I am afraid they do not,” said Alice, “and, Fred, it

is a good thing to want to tell others the good news and perhaps the Lord will want you to do that when you are older. Who knows?"

Then little Annie Andrus spoke.

"I think, teacher, that I am a better girl than I was, because I do not get so vexed at sister May when she pulls my curls mornings. I used to scream sometimes, and now I just set my teeth hard and ask Jesus to help me to keep back the yell! And I haven't quarrelled with Kittie in a week."

Fannie Brown was older than Annie (indeed, she was the oldest scholar in the school), and as Alice turned towards her, she said softly:

"I am so happy, and the little hymns which you have taught us keep bubbling over all the time. Everything goes right, and I love the Saviour, and am trying all the time to do what He would like to have me do. I don't know as it is being a Christian, but I want to be one, if I am not."

"What make you so queer tonight?" asked May that evening.

"Queer, am I?" returned Alice.

"Yes, queer and quiet. Your face shines as if you had heard some wonderful news or something."

"I have!" said Alice. "I have heard of that which angels smile over."

And then she told May the story of the afternoon, and May replied, more soberly than her wont, “I declare, Alice Merwyn, if there is anything in religion that will subdue such a boy as Fred Pratt has been, I shall believe in it! Why, he has been the terror of the neighborhood! And dear little Annie! I shall never twitch her hair again.”

May put up her frizzes silently with a quiet look on her face, and at length she turned to Alice and said:

“I believe I’ll go to Sunday school with you after this. I can’t have my little sister getting ahead of me.”

Do you think Alice Merwyn will ever regret the effort she made to help the children in that out-of-the-way neighborhood to a knowledge of the truths of the Bible?



Other Books by Isabella Alden

Isabella wrote over one-hundred books in her lifetime, as well as short stories and newspaper articles—all for the purpose of winning souls for Christ.

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